

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1           1.     A consumable order-assistance system for computer peripheral  
2 devices, comprising:

3                 a personal computer having a messaging system;  
4                 at least one computer peripheral device having a messaging system;  
5                 a communication link signal coupling the personal computer with a  
6 provider of a consumable for the computer peripheral device; and

7                 a user interaction site configured to receive a notification from the  
8 computer peripheral device via the messaging system of a need to order a  
9 consumable;

10                wherein the user interaction site is provided within one of: a single-  
11 connection environment as an end user interface; an unmanaged network  
12 environment as a workgroup administrator interface; and a server-based  
13 centralized network environment as a centralized system administrator interface.

1           2.     The consumable order-assistance system of claim 1 wherein  
2 the personal computer and the computer peripheral device are connected with a  
3 bus, and wherein the user interaction site comprises a printer driver of the  
4 personal computer provided within a single-connection environment.

1           3.     The consumable order-assistance system of claim 1 wherein  
2 the personal computer and the computer peripheral device are provided within  
3 an unmanaged network environment, the user interaction site comprises an  
4 embedded web server of the computer peripheral device, and the embedded  
5 web server generates and forwards a message to a user at the personal  
6 computer to prompt ordering of a consumable.

1           4.     The consumable order-assistance system of claim 1 wherein  
2 the personal computer and the computer peripheral device are provided within a  
3 network environment having a central server, the user interaction site comprises  
4 a network administrator personal computer communicating with the server, and



15 device at a time, and the centralized system administrator interface  
16 communicating with a server of a centralized network environment.

1 9. The system of claim 8 wherein the end user interaction system  
2 comprises a printer driver of the personal computer.

1 10. The system of claim 8 wherein the workgroup administrator  
2 interface comprises an embedded web server of the computer peripheral device.

1 11. The system of claim 8 wherein the centralized system  
2 administrator interface comprises a network management application usable by  
3 a network administrator.

1 12. The system of claim 8 wherein the end user interaction system  
2 is provided within a single-connection environment comprising the personal  
3 computer communicating with the computer peripheral device via a bus, and  
4 wherein a single user has dedicated access to the personal computer.

1 13. The system of claim 8 wherein the workgroup administrative  
2 interface comprises an embedded web server within the computer peripheral  
3 device, and wherein the embedded web server comprises an interface for the  
4 order-assistance system.

1 14. The system of claim 8 wherein the centralized system  
2 administrator interface comprises a centralized order-assistance tool, and  
3 wherein the centralized order-assistance tool is provided within a centralized  
4 network environment having a server.

1 15. The system of claim 8 wherein the computer peripheral device  
2 comprises an embedded web server, the personal computer and the computer  
3 peripheral device are provided within an unmanaged network environment, and

4 the embedded web server initiates ordering of a consumable in response to a  
5 detected need to replenish the consumable.

1 16. A method of providing order assistance, comprising:  
2 providing a computer peripheral device, a personal computer having a  
3 communication link with a provider of a consumable, a messaging system  
4 extending between the computer peripheral device and the personal computer,  
5 and a user interaction site;  
6 determining an environment in which the computer peripheral device  
7 and the personal computer are provided by detecting the presence of a parallel  
8 cable or the presence of a network environment;  
9 for the case where the presence of a network environment is  
10 detected, further broadcasting a discovery protocol to detect the presence of a  
11 centralized order-assistance solution; and  
12 based on the determined environment, providing the user interaction  
13 site in the form of: a user interface when the network environment comprises a  
14 single-connection environment; an embedded web server when the network  
15 environment comprises an unmanaged network environment; and a centralized  
16 system administrator interface when the network environment comprises a  
17 server-based, centralized network environment.

1 17. The method of claim 16 wherein, when the presence of a  
2 parallel cable is detected, the network environment is determined to be a single-  
3 connection environment, the computer peripheral device interacts at an end user  
4 level.

1 18. The method of claim 16 wherein the network environment  
2 comprises a single-connection environment, the user interface site comprises an  
3 interface to a consumable order assistance computer program resident on the  
4 personal computer, and the program provides an order location to a user for  
5 purchasing a consumable.

